

City of Northampton

Casino Mitigation Marketing Plan

FINAL
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[Introduction]

In September 2017, the Massachusetts Gaming Commission awarded Northampton a \$100,000 grant from its Casino Mitigation Fund to create and implement a marketing and advertising plan to attract MGM Springfield casino visitors. A 2013 Camoin Associates report commissioned by the city determined that Northampton could experience a \$4-\$8 million loss in recreational spending once the casino opens, and the marketing plan is viewed as a crucial step towards offsetting those losses. There has also been no consistent/sustained marketing and advertising campaign for Northampton in previous years, and this project is viewed as a stepping stone toward creating one.

Rhyme Digital was hired in April 2018 to develop the marketing plan for the city. Over the last several months, we have met with numerous business and community leaders, conducted focus groups, and done diligent research toward understanding not only how Northampton can compete with/attract visitors from MGM Springfield, but also how the city can further build on its reputation as a hub for arts, shopping, dining, entertainment, and more for years to come.

This plan represents what we feel is necessary to build a solid marketing foundation utilizing the current project budget, as well as outlining steps for continuation and expansion of efforts into 2019/2020, and beyond. It is clear that the \$100,000 budget will not last long, and that it will require developing creative assets which have maximum utility by reaching the right people at the right time. We recommend testing ideas on smaller scales before committing large sums of money, and measuring success with a variety of metrics.

Ultimately, the success of marketing Northampton to the surrounding regions will depend on the sustainability and consistency of the project beyond this phase. This may require things such as coordination amongst the various existing institutions and organizations already working to promote Northampton, sponsorships from the business community, or investments from the city itself. This project will provide a roadmap on how to get there, but it will not answer the question regarding who will bear the financial responsibility. Our hope is that the results from this phase will convince others to take up the torch.

Overall, Northampton is well-positioned to continue its role as a cultural and economic hub in Western Massachusetts. While the MGM Springfield casino may bring some economic threats, it also will provide opportunities that Northampton should be able to capitalize on. We feel that this marketing plan outlines the best path towards achieving those goals.



President, Rhyme Digital

[Executive Summary]

It is no secret that there is a direct overlap between Northampton's greatest strengths and MGM Springfield's newly developed assets—dining, nightlife, entertainment, and retail.

Northampton currently has an advantage with a wider variety in each and every one of these areas, both when compared to MGM Springfield as well as against other cities/towns in the area. While Springfield is working to develop more of these industries around MGM, Northampton has had an established footprint in Western Massachusetts for decades.

Current marketing for the area plays to these strengths in generic ways—there is a definitive lack of personality, which fails to capture the essence of what makes Northampton unique, and instead could be described as “Anytown, USA.” This is especially true because most of the content developed for these initiatives comes in written form, making it harder to differentiate. There is a distinctive lack of visual media when it comes to marketing assets specific to the City of Northampton, especially for the key dining, nightlife, entertainment, and retail economic segments. Developing compelling visual media which captures the eccentric/authentic Northampton experience will be essential in differentiating the city from “manufactured” experiences like the MGM Springfield casino.

The budget for this project should also be used in a way that maximizes its value and also provides crucial assets, data, and information. This is an opportunity to not necessarily commit to using the entire budget on a single approach up front, but to test messaging, targeting, and creative in order to make the next phase even more successful and to determine where to put future budget money. For all these reasons, digital and social media channels will be the most cost-effective and targeted use of advertising dollars.

This data-driven approach should also provide a compelling argument for continuing the project beyond this initial budgeted phase. Nearly everyone we spoke with underscored the need for a sustained tourism campaign for the city, but in the same breath were reluctant to support any future efforts without a direct benefit. A short- and long-term roadmap with summary data and recommendations is part of our overall plan.

We therefore recommend the following strategic priorities for the marketing plan:

- **Collecting/curating media assets and event/promotional information** with the help of local businesses, organizations, and other potential sources. These can be used across different platforms such as a website, social media, print, and more, and centralized in an online format which can be used as a hub for all marketing, tracking, and reporting for the project.
- **Customizing creative assets/messaging** to various geographic locations, audiences, and industry segments.
- **Generating market awareness** via monthly digital advertising campaigns which test creative, messaging, targeting, and channels, plus reporting which focuses on tracking key metrics and optimizing results.

Overall, the tactics to support the strategic priorities can be summarized as follows:

- **Building a website** which can serve as a central platform for all local events regarding dining, nightlife, entertainment, retail, and the arts.
- **Building a coalition of local contributors** from the business and arts communities as well as regular citizens to contribute media (i.e. photos and videos) which will be housed on the website to showcase everything happening in Northampton. These partnerships will be crucial to the plan's overall success.
- **Creating testable messaging for our core audience**, which we define as millennials/young professionals, high-income women, the LGBT community, and generic outreach to population within a 45-minute drive time.
- **Utilizing cost-effective digital marketing practices** to target the messaging at the audiences we have identified across Google search, banner ads, remarketing ads, social ads, and email marketing, since these channels will afford the most opportunity and targeting for the budget we have.
- **Working with an agency/marketing professional** to curate and test content and optimize campaigns based on results, rather than committing to too rigid a plan upfront. This allows for flexibility for managing the campaigns over time and putting budget dollars towards efforts which are most effective.
- **Creating measurable monthly reports** which will track and analyze analytics traffic through the website.
- **Creating a City Marketing Committee** which would hold vendors responsible for the execution of the marketing plan.
- **Reporting back to the business community often** on the results of the campaigns so that they can take advantage of the data gathered and apply to their own marketing campaigns/efforts.

We believe that this is best way to spend the initial casino mitigation funds and establish a solid foundation for future ongoing marketing for the City of Northampton. We also believe that finding sources of additional funding for the program will be easier with as much solid data as possible from this initial effort.

We have also provided several tiers/recommendations for additional funding requirements to keep and/or grow the scope of the program. While we could have mapped out a full 2-5 year plan for this project, we believe that this first stage needs to be executed and then decisions should be re-evaluated based on the data. However, these budget tiers should help for planning purposes once additional funding has been established.

[Research Methodology]

Throughout this process, Rhyme has taken the time to speak individually with a wide variety of business and community leaders across a variety of industries and representing a variety of interests. We have also met with several business organizations for Q&As, plus conducted focus groups that were designed to provide insight to target audiences, branding, and marketing methodology. We also have poured through a wealth of data and resources, including potential impact analyses for the current CT casinos, current CT casino demographic information, analyzing aggregate analytics provided from local Northampton businesses and organizations, marketing plans from similar sized cities, and more.

One theme that emerged was that Northampton suffered from a lack of consistent, centralized, and frequent tourism marketing. While there have been efforts in the past to market the city, it has been fragmented and sporadic at best, with often many different organizations applying their own techniques and messaging.

As we reviewed the data we received, we paid particularly close attention to metrics that we can use to measure success and examine trends over time. Getting more businesses and organizations to participate in aggregating and/or segmenting this data will help provide clearer feedback as the campaign moves forward.

We believe that the best way to ensure that the marketing campaign for Northampton is sustainable is to be transparent with this data and share it freely with local businesses and organizations. This way, they can hopefully not only support the ongoing efforts, but also apply the lessons learned to their own marketing.

[Key Audiences]

While we found a great many audience segments that currently frequent downtown Northampton (including students from the colleges and their visiting parents), we are focusing this plan on the ones who will likely frequent the casino. Our hope is that once this initial plan takes hold, the City of Northampton can expand its reach to include these audiences, but that these are initially the most important in the near term. We address these additional audiences in the long-term plan recommendations. We also believe that while eventually we will expand the marketing to include all of Northampton as a whole, the initial focus should focus first on promoting the downtown, with the hope that there will be a “halo-effect” which will benefit all businesses as a whole.

A. Millennials/Young Professionals

- Age 25-40
- \$50K+ income
- Interested in social outings/experiences
- College educated

B. Higher Income Women

- Age 45-65
- \$75K+ income
- College educated
- Looking for exciting, high-end experiences, not necessarily gambling
- Enjoys the shopping experience

C. LGBT Community

- Promote LGBT events like Pride Parade, but also focus on how the “pride exists year-round”
- Promote LGBT-specific venues in Northampton
- Knows about Northampton’s reputation for supporting the LGBT community, and just needs to be reinforced

D. Foodies/Travelers/Shoppers within 45-minute Drive Time

- Focus on the diversity of options in these categories
- This is best audience for experimentation, and would be ideal to determine audiences outside of the above (i.e., consider how to draw older men out from the casino).
- Population centers such as Hartford, Worcester, and Springfield should be prioritized along with the entire I-91 corridor from Hartford to Brattleboro.

[Strategic Priority Overview]

Collecting/curating media assets, event, and promotional info.

Development of a single website platform where a public-facing library of photos, videos, event information, and local promotions can be submitted, curated, stored, and made searchable to the general public.

Short Term Tactics

- **Develop website platform** with landing pages, submission process & curation capabilities for easy management and participation
- **Develop partnerships and/or outreach with key local businesses** in restaurant, entertainment, and nightlife businesses and organizations, as well as local photographers and videographers
- **Conduct consumer outreach on social media platforms** to solicit contributions using contests

Near Term Tactics

- **Identify brand ambassadors** from different market segments who can contribute and curate regular content
- **Coordinate efforts** between campaign and local tourism organizations
- **Determine additional funding**/ways to provide additional incentives and contests to reward and encourage participation

Long Term Tactics

- **Develop an app** which can direct-post photos and videos to the platform to encourage participation
- **Earn revenue via boosted payment system** which allows businesses/orgs to pay for premium placement on the website
- **Earn additional revenue** via paid ad placements via networks like Google Display, by allowing the public to place ads on the website

[Strategic Priority Overview]

Customizing creative assets/messaging.

Organize creative assets and develop messaging for up to four different target audiences that overlap with the casino and current Northampton audience segments: millennials/young professionals, high-income women, the LGBT community, and generic outreach to population within a 45-minute drive time.

Short Term Tactics

- **Develop testable messaging** for each segment, focused on retail, dining, nightlife, entertainment events/venues
- **Develop strategy for email** list development

Near Term Tactics

- **Expand messaging** to include other industry and audience segments beyond retail, dining, nightlife, entertainment, such as health & wellness, recreation, museums, historical sites, and others
- **Segment email lists** based on consumer interests
- **Develop additional creative assets** based on messaging test results

Long Term Tactics

- **Ensure consistency and regular frequency of communications** to each market segment based on test results
- **Continue to expand geographic reach** to other major metro markets

[Strategic Priority Overview]

Generating market awareness.

Dedicate a significant portion of the budget for digital and social advertising, optimizing delivery and targeting over time. Using an agency or dedicated marketing staff will be essential to not only create the deliverables, but also actively monitor the campaign and adjust according to incoming data. Use lessons learned to expand into more traditional mass media as budget allows, as well as expand geographic reach.

Short Term Tactics

- **Develop ad creative** for use across digital and social platforms
- **Set measurable goals**, such as interaction rates with local businesses, orgs
- **Focus digital/social ads** on targeted segments and geography
- **Monitor and report** on results monthly

Near Term Tactics

- **Saturate key market areas** while measuring/ determining what future ad spend should be based on results
- **Boost ad budgets** during key seasonal dates
- **Develop segmented remarketing lists** which can target ads to consumers based on places they have visited on the website.
- **Deliver a comprehensive report to the business community** to help them improve their own marketing/targeting

Long Term Tactics

- **Continue to scale up digital program** using cost-per-conversion metrics that determine how much ad spend is needed to achieve a given result
- **Present quarterly reports** to the business community
- **Survey email lists annually** to find ways to continuously add value
- **As budget allows, explore traditional media placements** such as outdoor, TV, etc, utilizing results and data
- **Pitch to media, bloggers, and social media influencers**, encouraging them to visit and experience Northampton for themselves
- **A "big hairy audacious arts project"** which can bring lasting recognition to the city and showcase the arts community

[Short-Term Strategies & Tactics]

Collecting/curating media assets, event, and promotional info

One of the key premises for this plan is that it is difficult to find current happenings and event information from nightlife, dining, arts/entertainment, and retail establishments for all in one central place for the city of Northampton. To further compound matters, developing media assets is expensive, especially photos and videos, and would likely eat up a majority of the initial budget.

However, existing businesses are doing great things on Facebook and Instagram, and there is a wealth of artists in the local area. If that content could be collected/curated to highlight what is happening in a creative way, as well as give people the ability to easily push content to a central location (such as a website), it would provide a steady feed of new content and reduce the potential ongoing workload for a marketing team/professional in charge of managing the program.

It will be crucial to spend time to curate content initially to gain momentum and develop a wide representation from the dining, nightlife, and entertainment establishments. Contests and incentives would help spur participation from the general public. Likewise, local artists/photographers/videographers/businesses/organizations should be courted to participate.

Develop website platform

In order to start collecting and curating assets, we first need a place to store them. While the website development will be a significant portion of the initial budget, it will provide a foundation and act as a “hub” for many of the digital marketing activities proposed in the plan, and is a worthwhile investment to spur future expanded marketing activities. It would feature, at minimum:

- **Ability for the public/businesses to push events, photos, and videos**, with an easy to use submission process that allows moderators to approve/disapprove/curate posts.
- **Ability for administrators to curate content**, and upload their own content from the backend from multiple sources, such as from other event calendars or feeds from other websites.
- **Ability for the public to sort/search/filter events** by category or interest.
- **Email subscription** to opt-in to receive weekly or monthly emails focused on user interests and other potential events/happenings.
- **Information about getting around Northampton**, such as links to download maps, and/or the Parkmobile app which will help visitors navigate downtown once they are here.

Develop website platform (continued)

- **Mobile-friendly interface**, allowing it to be used/accessed from all devices.
- **Analytics tracking** which will prove useful in analyzing the success of the digital campaigns and provide valuable data that can inform future marketing decisions.

Develop partnerships and/or outreach with key local businesses

Outreach to local businesses, organizations, artists, photographers, and videographers for support will be crucial in getting the platform off the ground and establishing key relationships. Some of the key audiences to reach out to are the NAYP, Noho Pride, DNA, Arts Council, local businesses, and more. Some suggested ways of approaching this are:

- **Offering premium account access to the new website**, which would include their own login and ability to post featured promotions or events, which will be highlighted on the website, as well as a profile page where they can showcase their own content.
- **Specialized contests targeted specifically to businesses/orgs** for the chance to promote themselves with advertising across the website.
- **Development of business/organization-specific email lists** and conducting simple targeted campaigns to organizations with links to PDFs outlining the key benefits of participation in the program.

Conduct consumer outreach on social media platforms

Setting up social media accounts for the project will provide several different ways to interact with both other businesses/organizations and the general public. While we are primarily focused on the ones with advertising capabilities (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), as new platforms roll out they should be evaluated for audience and capabilities. These accounts should let the campaign:

- **Communicate and engage users frequently with a consistent voice/tone**, which we recommend should be upbeat, enthusiastic, genuine, and friendly, with posts at least once per day.
- **Run consumer contests focused on submitting photo/video content**, with prizes that involve experiencing a night out in Northampton in creative ways. Themes could change each month (breweries, shopping, dining, favorite) and run along target audience segments.

Customizing creative assets and messaging.

Development of testable messaging

One of the key tenets of this plan is to continually test the ad creative and messaging during this initial phase of the campaign in order to determine what works and what doesn't for each audience. This includes testing images used in the ads as well as their headlines, and showing them in an equal amount to each audience (known as A/B testing), and then examining whether there was a preference. Testing the messaging will require:

- **Simple, punchy headlines that are easily swapped out** from different digital advertisements. The simpler the headline, the more easily it will be to swap it out across dozens of potential ad sets. It also helps to narrow the focus of what the user is responding to..
- **Banner ads with simple imagery**, as opposed to a collage of potentially disparate photos, so that it will be clear what the testing reveals.
- **Creating ads for every combination of audience and market**, so that any differences between the audience and their reaction to dining, nightlife, entertainment, and shopping can be noted.

Development of an Email List Strategy

It will be imperative to collect emails from consumers and businesses in order to provide them with relevant information throughout the course of the campaign. However, building an email list from scratch will be a challenge, so there needs to be a comprehensive strategy in place to incentivize users to sign up. Some of these strategies should include:

- **Prominently place email sign up forms** across all social media pages and the new website with clear calls to action on why users should sign up.
- **Partnering with existing local member organizations** to promote the link to sign up for the email lists in their existing email outreach/communications.
- **Reaching out to other existing Facebook pages** to help spread the word to existing audiences
- **Running social/online contests that feature the email sign up as an option**, but do not make it a requirement to participate, thus lowering the barrier to entry.
- **Segmenting the email lists based on interests**, in order to make sure you are providing the most relevant information to the consumers. While this segmentation may not necessary to start the campaign, interests should be collected from users for future reference.

Generating market awareness.

Develop Ad Creative for Campaigns

The actual development of the ad creative will involve writing text ads for use on various ad platforms as well as developing banner ads for use on the different display advertising networks. While we have more specific recommendations for how to execute the creative in the Appendix, the primary ad platforms that we recommend are:

- **Google Search ads**, for their ability to tap into a user's active search on Google and display relevant results. It also allows us to target a user based on their geography, so that we can look for users with a 45-minute drive time searching for "Things to Do in Western Mass," for example.
- **Google Display Banner ads**, which allow us to place banner ads on websites which have allowed Google to display ads, such as local media websites, blogs, and other sites. This is more cost effective than normally working with the sites directly to place ads, but the only downside is that you cannot control placement of the ads.
- **YouTube Pre-roll ads**, which allow you to place quick 5-15 second video ads before a video plays. Because you can choose which video topics and certain demographics of users to display your ad, it allows for customization of your message to the audience.
- **Facebook/Instagram paid ads and Likes campaigns**, which will be helpful in ensuring the right message gets in front of the right audience, and will help to build an audience of followers who will be looking for regular updates and engagement.

See Appendix for Example Branding/Ad Creative

Set Measurable Goals

At every step of the way, we should always be measuring the impact of any ad campaigns we run. That's why it is imperative to properly set up analytics and data tracking across the website, email, and social platforms. We should look at what actions are most desirable on the website, email, and social platforms, and be tracking them as "goals" for each platform. These goals will:

- **Help measure effectiveness and dictate ad spend**, enabling us to arrive at metrics that will help determine how much we have to spend for each person's email that we wish to collect, for example.
- **Provide valuable feedback to our ad platforms**, setting up a "feedback loop" that tells Google Ads which ads are delivering desirable actions, for example, and therefore can automate and optimize campaigns automatically.

Focus ads on targeted segments and geography

One of the advantages of digital marketing is the ability to put testable messages in front of the right audience at the right time. For example, Facebook has a wide variety of [targeting criteria](#) which can be used to deliver ads, as seen here. Furthermore, ads can be delivered within or around a geographic boundary, which helps make the ad spend as efficient as possible. Some examples that we recommend are:

- **Using demographic and behavior targeting data**, which is available across both Google and Facebook's ad platforms. This criteria looks at a user's web browsing patterns and allows us to use that data to deliver our ads, so that the right messages can align with each of our target audiences.
- **Building "lookalike" audiences based on website visitors.** As traffic picks up on the website and email addresses are collected, we can use that collective data to build a profile of a potential visitor. This profile data can then be used on the various ad platforms we have outlined to target web users who match that same profile, who are called "lookalike" audiences.
- **Geographic targeting of ads**, starting with a 45-minute drive time around the Northampton area. Where possible, campaigns should be weighted to focus on the I-91 corridor, especially those coming from Hartford and the I-90 stretch from I-91 to I-84 since those areas contain some of the desirable demographics from our audience segments. The Berkshires should also be targeted seasonally from late Spring to late Fall, when most of the "vacation home" population is present.

Monitor and report on results monthly

The monthly reporting process will be an extremely important part of this plan, as it will provide an opportunity to learn about what tactics are working and which need further consideration, and help gauge overall success. Likewise, the reports provide an opportunity to help local businesses make decisions about their own marketing in the future. Some guidelines we recommend are:

- **Establishing a committee of local marketing professionals**, which will help evaluate performance metrics and provide accountability for recommendations and results.
- **Creating reporting that is easy to digest** by working with the committee to break out key metrics and trends which make them comprehensive yet understandable. For example, not reporting on just clicks and views of ads, but getting to the real heart of how much impact the ad budget has on actions on the website, such as email signups and potential clicks to local business websites.
- **Ensuring a focus on recommendations/next steps** which go beyond simply describing what happened, and instead thinking about what we will do about it and what we expect to happen as a result.

[Near-Term Strategies & Tactics]

Curation of media assets, event, and promotional information.

As the campaigns are launched and the basic foundations for the digital advertising are in place, establishing relationships with existing organizations/leaders, identifying new leaders who can assist with media efforts, and engaging the business community to provide incentives to consumers will be key to the program's success.

Identify brand ambassadors

There should be people who can be relied upon to frequently engage with the website and social media pages. These people should ideally make up a cross-section of each of our target audiences, and special efforts should be made to recruit them to continue their ongoing engagement. Some tactics to identify and encourage these people include

- **Measuring frequent submitters** to the website, whether via photos/videos/events.
- **Following/monitoring key Northampton hashtags**, such as the popular *#northamptonma*, and tracking submissions to the hashtag and identifying potential help based on the quality of their posts.
- **Automating follow up messages to people who submit on the website**, using popular email marketing tools to automatically deliver messages after a certain amount of time has passed to remind them to keep up their engagement with the campaigns.

Coordinate efforts between local organizations

The existing local business, arts, and community organizations here in Northampton are already putting forth a lot of effort on their own, and it will be extremely important to get them on board with the campaign and also share resources that are being generated for their own use. Some key

- **Cross-promotion of key events**, such as the Sidewalk Sale, Pride Parade, Arts Night Out, Tuesday Farmers Market, and more should be cross-promoted between organizations.
- **Monthly outreach regarding events**, in order to make sure that the website has the latest and most important information. Regular contact and meetings with key members in each organization should be a priority.
- **Publishing/sharing resources between organizations** in order to bolster efforts among all parties. This includes actively reaching out with photos, videos, website and campaign data, and more.

Solicit/procure additional funding, incentives, and contests

Because part of the strategy is to build incentive for users to participate on the website and join email lists, we will need a source of additional funding in order to run contests and promotional giveaways. There should be an active solicitation of the business community to help provide some of these prizes in the form of products/gift-cards. These could be considered in exchange for exposure on the site and to the email list. However, this will likely only be possible once the campaign has established a steady stream of traffic to the site in order to be appealing for local businesses.

Segmentation of creative assets/messaging.**Expand messaging to include more segments**

While our initial focus on dining, arts/entertainment, nightlife, shopping/retail will do the most to counteract the effects of the casino, eventually the campaign should expand to include hotels, family activities, recreation, relaxation, museum, local landmarks, and more.

Further segment email lists based on interests

Once the email lists have reached a critical mass, we can use the user interests we collect to further divide the email lists by the additional topics/interests above. The same content can be generated as previous emails, but divided across the interests and result in shorter emails that are more relevant to the user while not necessarily increasing the workload required to generate them.

Develop additional creative assets based on test results

Once the initial testing has been done on the messaging and advertisements, we can then expand them to include the additional interests mentioned above and apply some of the lessons learned to the creative assets. It will still be important to test these ads in the same fashion, as well as to set up pages on the website that reflect these new interest categories.

Generate market awareness.

Saturate key market areas, use metrics to determine future ad spend

As the campaigns run, data will be collected which will help us understand what the average cost is to achieve a particular goal or result, and this can help us determine what the future advertising budget needed. For example, if we can determine that the average cost to acquire a new email list subscriber is \$10, it helps to set realistic goals and expectations for future campaigns. This is known as determining the “cost per acquisition.” Likewise, we should also be able to determine whether the ad spend has allowed us to saturate our audience, making sure that everyone we target has seen the ads at least several times. We should be able to see the percentage of this audience we have reached, and use those numbers to influence future ad spend as well.

Boost ad budgets during key seasonal dates

It will be important to spread the ad budgets around on a seasonal basis to align with when they can have the greatest impact. Based on our research from other organizations and businesses in the area, the key dates where ad budgets should be increased are:

- **College arrival/departure/graduation/parents' weekends**, as college parents' are one of the larger sources of retail revenue
- **Start of warmer weather in the spring**, most notably April 1 through May 15 when the city becomes most walkable
- **Summer weekends**
- **Peak foliage season** from Labor Day through mid-October
- **Holiday shopping season**, Thanksgiving to Xmas.

We should also keep in mind experimenting with trying creative ways to **bolster the shoulder season** of January through April, such as capturing traffic passing up and down I-91 for the prime ski season starting on Thursdays through Sundays.

Develop segmented remarketing lists

Remarketing lists are ways of tagging visitors that come through the website for the purposes of showing them ads after they have left the website. This is a common practice that many are familiar with, such as when you shop for a pair of shoes on Amazon.com and then see that pair of shoes in other places on the web. As more topics are added to the website, it will be important to utilize remarketing lists, as they will help to further refine and target digital ads to interested parties as well as monitor the overall saturation and frequency of ads delivered to those audiences, helping to determine future budget needs.

Deliver a comprehensive report to the business community

Upon completion of the initial phase of the project, the most useful piece of information will be the data gathered over the course of the campaign. We feel that this data is valuable to the local Northampton business community, and should be summarized into a final report in order to help them with their own marketing. This report should explain the methodology and targeting used, along with recommendations for digital activities that line up with the different business segments in the city. The goal of this report should be to make a case to the business community on how this program made a direct impact to their businesses and how they can use the lessons learned to either continue to support the program or to use the information to improve their own marketing. This report should also detail the hours of work performed by the agency/marketing team and provide recommendations for future staffing levels needed to support the next phases of the campaign.

[Long-Term Strategies & Tactics]

These recommendations are intended to be implemented beyond the scope of funding for the initial project and are dependent upon additional funding to sustain the program. They build upon the foundation established in the initial phase and seek to capitalize upon those efforts in a way that continues to maximize its effectiveness.

Curation of media assets, event, and promotional information.

Develop an app which can direct-post photos and videos

It is imperative that in the planning for the website development that consideration be made for supporting a native (iOS/Android) app. This app could support viewing/posting of photos/video and event submissions, and be as simple (or hopefully simpler) to use as the website. An app that is native on the user's phone could be utilized for additional functionality, such as push-notifications to subscribed event reminders, promotions, and deals. However, the development of an app would also require consistent ongoing development to succeed, which would also require ongoing financing.

Boosted payment system

In looking for ways to utilize the website to generate funding for the campaign, something to consider would be a "boosted" payment system. Similar to how Facebook makes it easy for businesses to pay to promote their posts, a system could be developed to allow businesses and organizations to pay to promote their posts/events for a fixed amount of time. This would address the reluctance of businesses to commit to fixed monthly subscriptions and allows them to pay only when they need it.

Google AdSense/DoubleClick Ad Exchange

Google AdSense and the complementary Doubleclick Ad Exchange allow 3rd parties to place non-intrusive ads on the website. By doing so, the site could earn ad revenue for each ad placed, and would help offset some ad spend for the campaign. However, this would also need a discussion as to who manages the account and its funds, and monitoring how the ads are being placed.

Segmentation of creative assets/messaging.

Ensure consistency and frequency of communications

Whatever the long-term budget, regular and consistent communications that continue to A/B test and adjust messaging based on the results is imperative. Each subsequent year should begin with a set of goals and a testable set of assumptions designed to improve the messaging to achieve those goals. It also helps to ensure consistent use of the logo, branding, and other creative assets, which should be monitored and reviewed annually to determine effectiveness.

Expand geographic reach to other major metro markets

As saturation of the local market is achieved, the geographic targeting should be shifted to include major metro markets such as Boston, NYC, and Albany. These markets should be treated as completely separate campaigns with a separate strategy for each one, since they are very different than the initial 45-minute drive time we are targeting. These efforts should be coordinated with local Massachusetts tourism organizations to avoid overlap of efforts, but yet start with the same audience targeting original to the local campaign.

Market Awareness

Continue to scale up digital program using cost-per-conversion metrics

As previously mentioned, when we are able to successfully predict the amount of money needed to achieve a goal (i.e. an email list signup), we should be able to scale the campaign significantly and maintain near the same cost-per-result. However, there will come a point at which the campaign spend sees a plateau of diminishing returns, and this must be monitored closely.

Present quarterly reports to the business community

Regardless of budget, similar to the initial phase campaign summary report, there should be quarterly reports released to the business community which explain goals, efforts, results, and recommendations. These reports should become a local event in and of themselves, building anticipation for their release.

Survey email lists annually

It will be important to survey the mailing lists each year to solicit feedback, new ideas, and evaluate the value being delivered to potential visitors. The collected data should be evaluated and shared publicly as an addendum to the reports.

Explore traditional media placements such as outdoor, TV, etc

While these traditional media recommendations are largely budget-dependent, they should be considered when the digital campaigns can demonstrate that they have saturated the digital market and determined the most effective messages for reaching each audience. Some of these options include:

- **Digital billboards along I-91/I-90**, which are less expensive and easier to procure and swap content.
- **Television ads**, targeted towards the Springfield/Holyoke DMA (Designated Market Area), which are simple, straightforward, and mimic banner advertising with video. Consider “streaming” TV ads which are useful in targeting millennial cord-cutters as it is a less expensive option.
- **Paid Placements/Takeovers on local Media for specific local events.** When events are scheduled in and around Northampton that can be determined to be a significant draw, we recommend considering partnering with local media provider like Masslive, WWLP, or WesternMassNews. Examples of the promotable events include conventions/exhibitions in the MassMutual Center, The Big E, and more.

Pitch to media, bloggers, and social media influencers

Once a critical mass of photos/video have been accumulated on the website, it provides some compelling ammunition to pitch media, bloggers, and social media influencers. These pitches should align with dining, travel, nightlife, entertainment, LGBT, and other segments from the campaigns, with the goal of earning media coverage.

A “Big Hairy Audacious Arts Project”

Northampton has a reputation for being supportive of the arts and artists, and there are numerous art installations across the city. By reaching out to the arts community and funding the development of a physical art installation and/or mural in the city could be very powerful, especially something that ties together the photos/videos that have been collected in a way that tells the story of Northampton in a unique way.

[Budget & Timeline Breakdown]

The total \$85,000 budget can be broken down into three primary categories:

Website Development **\$35,000**

It is recommended to build the website in phases so as to not delay launch of the campaigns. The Phase 1 launch should occur within within 1-2 months, with basic event listing information, categories of pictures and video, and the ability for an administrator manually manage/curate the content in the backend of the website. The Phase 2 launch should occur within 3-4 months and include all frontend user submission functionality. This budget includes a budget of \$100/month for website hosting and domain registration.

Hire Agency/Marketing Professional on 6-9 month Retainer Basis **\$30,000**

Rather than quote out each individual piece of ad creative, emails sent, and individual reporting, it will be far more efficient to contract with an agency or marketing professional on a retainer basis for a set number of hours per month. This allows for flexibility to ramp up activity when needed as well as react to campaign performance.

At minimum, the monthly retainer should include in the first 3-5 months:

- Community outreach to develop relationships with businesses/organizations/artists
- Consumer outreach on social media platforms
- Development of testable messaging for each market segment
- Email list development & segmentation
- A/B testing across all ads/email subjects/landing pages
- Branding & identity options, plus recommendations for ad creative
- Setup and ongoing management of all segmented campaigns
- Monthly monitoring and reporting

In the following 3-5 months, the retainer activities should expand to include:

- Identification and outreach to brand ambassadors
- Outreach to local tourism organizations
- Solicitation of donations/prizes for promotional use
- Expansion of ad messaging to include additional market segments
- Development of additional creative assets based on A/B test results
- Management of ad budgets during key seasonal periods
- Setup of segmented remarketing lists

Finally, the retainer should conclude with the Final Summary Report.

Digital Advertising Budget **\$20,000**

It is recommended to start testing ad campaigns with no more than \$1,000 for 3-4 weeks to gather recommended data. Following the initial data gathering process, the agency/marketing professional should present recommendations for budget allocations.

[Future Budget Recommendations]

These recommendations should be evaluated against actual data upon the completion of the initial phase/budget for the Casino Mitigation Project.

MINIMUM SUSTAINABLE LEVEL **\$45,000 annually**

This level assumes the minimum level of engagement required in order to keep the program active, updated, and effective in a “maintenance mode.” This is the minimum level that we recommend in order to sustain the campaign with a digital presence.

Digital Ad Spend **\$1,000-\$2,000/mo**

- At these minimum levels it should be possible to achieve the same results and market saturation over time, given a total annual budget of roughly \$20,000.

Campaign Management **\$1,000-\$2,000/mo**

- Assuming that the results of the initial campaign are optimized by the end of the program, it should be possible for a marketing professional or agency to manage the digital ad campaigns at a basic level on an annual basis for roughly \$20,000 annually.
- Hiring a part-time communications manager for the program is also an option.
- This would include at minimum:
 - Monitoring and management of the digital ad campaigns and placements.
 - Occasional ad creative updates.
 - Social media management.
 - Website moderation/curation.
 - Monthly reporting.
 - 1-2 emails per month.

Website Maintenance **\$5,000 annually**

- The website should be actively updated and maintained with the latest software.
- Includes hosting fees of approx \$1,200 per year.
- Includes minor assistance with landing pages.

IDEAL GROWTH LEVEL**\$75,000 annually**

This level assumes a budget that seeks steady growth, optimization, and progress for the program over time, reaching an ever expanding audience in terms of demographics and geographic reach.

Digital Ad Spend**\$2,500-\$3,000/mo**

- At this level it should be possible to expand targeting to new markets and segments and reach some of the nearby major metro areas, given a total annual budget of roughly \$32,500.

Discretionary Ad Spend**\$5,000 annually**

- This budget should be reserved for strategic ad buys such as local market cable television ads or direct site placements during key times of year.
- Decision/audience/placements to be determined by previous ad performance.

Campaign Management**\$2,500/mo**

- Hiring an agency or part-time communications manager to manage the program actively with monthly creative updates, adjustments, and recommendations to the digital program should ensure steady growth and help to widen the targeting with the increased budget. Annual budget would be approx \$30,000.
- This would include at minimum:
 - Monitoring and management of the digital ad campaigns and placements.
 - Monthly ad creative updates.
 - Social media management including monthly promotional contests.
 - Regular contact with business community and brand ambassadors.
 - Basic monthly reporting with recommendations.
 - Website moderation and curation.
 - 4-8 emails per month.

Website Maintenance**\$7,500 annually**

- The website should be actively updated and maintained with the latest software.
- Includes hosting fees of approx \$1,200 per year.
- Includes assistance with landing pages, search engine optimization, additional analytics tracking features, and user interface improvements.

COMPREHENSIVE LEVEL**\$125,000 annually**

This level would be ideal for checking off all items on a complete and comprehensive marketing approach which addressed a balance between targeted digital placements and mass-market reach across the region from Boston to NYC.

Digital Ad Spend**\$2,500-\$3,000/mo**

- This same level of targeted digital placements should remain the same given the extra exposure from other traditional media outlets, with an annual budget of roughly \$32,500.

Television Advertising Placements**\$30,000 annually**

- Local market TV ad buys during key periods throughout the year.
- Ad subjects to be determined by digital ad data/performance from initial program.
- Should also include streaming TV and YouTube pre-roll ads in addition to cable television to maximize the reach and include cord-cutters.

Digital Billboard Placements**\$20,000 annually**

- Strategically placed ads on digital billboard locations throughout the I-91 and I-90 corridor would maximize the daily impressions.
- Placements should be timed around key events throughout the year, depending on location.

Campaign Management**\$2,500/mo**

- This would remain similar to the previous level at \$30,000 per year.
- This would include at minimum:
 - Monitoring and management of the digital ad campaigns and placements.
 - Monthly ad creative updates.
 - Social media management including monthly promotional contests.
 - Regular contact with business community and brand ambassadors.
 - Basic monthly reporting with recommendations.
 - Website moderation and curation.
 - 4-8 emails per month.

Website Maintenance**\$7,500 annually**

- Same as the previous level—actively updating and maintaining the website with the latest software.
- Includes hosting fees of approx \$1,200 per year.

ONE-TIME EXPENDITURES

These options are provided as potential one-time budget items.

Native Mobile App

\$50,000-\$75,000

- Development of a cross-platform native mobile application (for iOS and Android) which interfaces with the website in order to perform the following functions:
 - Allows all users to view events, photos, and video previously posted to the platform.
 - Login or register for account-level access.
 - Ability for logged in users to post events, photos, and videos to the platform.
- Includes design of interface based on existing branding/identity as well as cross-platform development.
- Budget for a minimum of \$5,000 in annual maintenance to keep application updated for both platforms.

Arts Project

\$5,000-\$10,000

- Procurement of a local artist to create an installation which utilizes media and elements from the initial campaign to tell the Northampton story.
- Location would be determined by the city.

[Branding & Identity Guidelines]

Because we are recommending going with a targeted digital campaign for this program, one of the elements that we are sensitive to is the development of a Northampton identity including logo and tagline.

We have the following criteria/guidelines for the identity, given our experience with previous digital campaigns:

- **Keep things simple and reusable across many situations** (i.e., have a logo that works in vertical and horizontal formats, a tagline that can be applied universally to all markets/industries).
- **Create ad concepts and headlines that are easy to test**, meaning that they can easily be swapped out for other headlines/images/colors and that there are minimal combinations of elements to test. For example, including 1-3 images in an ad as opposed to a large collage, one headline versus multiple with body copy, etc.

We are also recommending that because the top performing hashtag on Instagram for Northampton is #northamptonma, we should use that as a way to drive participation in the program. **This means actually using #northamptonma as the logo and not just as an afterthought.**

Tone & Messaging

- **Authentic.** In order to juxtapose the experience of downtown Northampton to that of the MGM casino, we need to show real pictures of real people, real locations, doing real things in Northampton. No stock photography, ever. While this will incur a burden of curating media for the project, it helps reinforce the concept.
- **Action-oriented.** Messaging should always be about “doing something” in the city.
- **People-focused.** People should always be included in any photos/videos to connect viewers to the activities featured, preferably in groups.
- **Bright & Colorful.** Use of bright, colorful hues and language is representative of Northampton’s persona, from its painted sidewalks, unique storefronts, and general architecture.
- **Weird/edgy/goofy at times.** The ads should try to highlight Northampton’s weird and unique side, since that is also a big differentiator to other cities/towns in the region.

The following pages show recommended examples of this type of thinking, and are not meant to represent exact representations of the ad campaign, but to provide guidelines which should help facilitate its development.



#northamptonma

#northamptonma

#northamptonma

ALWAYS DIFFERENT

ALWAYS DIFFERENT

ALWAYS DIFFERENT



'A BITE TO EAT' ISN'T JUST
'A BITE TO EAT' IN NORTHAMPTON



#northamptonma

ALWAYS DIFFERENT



'DRINKS' ISN'T JUST
'DRINKS' IN NORTHAMPTON



#northamptonma

ALWAYS DIFFERENT



'COFFEE' ISN'T JUST 'COFFEE'
IN NORTHAMPTON



#northamptonma

ALWAYS DIFFERENT

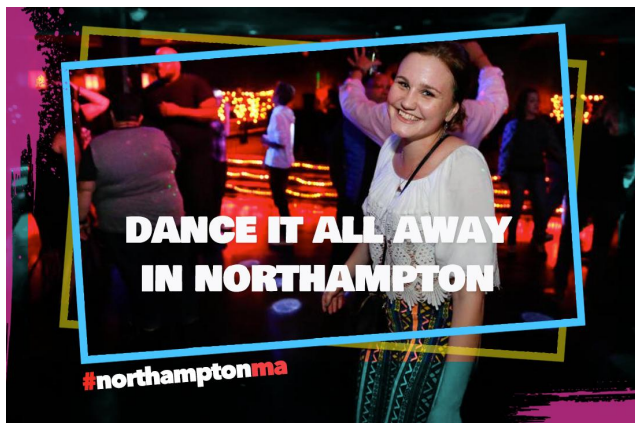


A 'CONCERT' ISN'T JUST A
'CONCERT' IN NORTHAMPTON



#northamptonma

ALWAYS DIFFERENT



[Answers to Potential Questions]

As we set out to develop this plan, there were numerous suggestions and strategies that were offered up from various members of the community, and while we have included some in our proposal, we felt the need to offer some answers to potential questions on ones that may not have made it into our recommendations, for clarity:

- **Why not put more effort into directly attracting MGM casino-goers?**

While looking at marketing plans for other casinos as well as MGMs, it is going to be much more difficult to pull people away from the casino when they have built their own centralized retail/dining/entertainment complex. We feel it is a better strategy and use of budget to focus on people who have not decided to go to the casino yet (i.e., further up their decision-making process) to convince them that Northampton has more options. However, we would not be against trying to target casino-goers traveling up and down the 1-91 corridor or coming via 1-90 on their way to the casino.

- **Why no traditional brochures/rack cards which can be added to hotel room packets in the area?**

We felt that given the cost of printing, shelf-life, and the volume of material already in those packets, it was not cost-effective to place information in hotels, especially as more move to digital delivery and hospitality options expand with AirBnB. Given the initial budget, most any printed pieces with limited shelf life would not be a responsible use of funds.

- **Why is everything mostly digital and not traditional media?**

Because of the measurability and trackability of digital media, we felt it was important to use the initial budget as cost-effectively as possible and to gain as much data in the process. Digital media is ideal for this scenario.

- **What about addressing things like wayfinding, parking, beautification, and other issues?**

The city already has efforts for wayfinding signage in process, and we plan on addressing the parking issue with clear instructions for using the ParkMobile app on the website. There are also other plans for street maintenance/beautification in process, but which are outside the scope of this proposal.

- **Why are you only focusing on certain industries to start? Why is mine not included?**

This initial campaign is designed to combat the effects of lost revenue to the casino, which primarily includes dining/retail/nightlife/entertainment. These are the most sensible areas to focus on to start because Northampton has the biggest advantage in terms of variety and quality of options.

[Answers to Potential Questions]

- **Why are you concentrating on downtown businesses only to start?**

In short, we want to try to avoid overextending ourselves in terms of budget and resources with the launch of this campaign. Those downtown businesses have the most direct overlap with the MGM Springfield casino, and it makes sense that if we can bolster them first it should have a “halo-effect” for surrounding area businesses. We do recommend expanding to include the totality of businesses to promote all of what Northampton has to offer, but only after addressing and establishing successful metrics for the core downtown businesses.

[Thank You]

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